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ABSTRACT

A study examined how many of 11 key words in 4 famous Mother Goose nursery rhymes were understood by parents of first graders. The first questionnaire (designed to determine if context clues were helpful in deciphering what words meant) was returned by 37 parents in an urban school district and by 49 parents in a suburban school district. The second questionnaire (asking parents to write out the definitions if they were known) was sent to parents in two entirely different school districts. Results indicated that a large number of the parents who read these rhymes to their children had no or inadequate knowledge of key word meanings. (Three tables of data are included; 20 references and both questionnaires are attached.) (RS)

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The Uncertainty of Word Meanings Found in Nursery Rhyme Vocabulary

Presented to
Dr. Albert Mazurkiewicz

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for a
Masters of Arts
Degree in Reading
at
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by

Linda C. Gruss

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Abstract

Four nursery rhymes were used in this study: "Mary had a Little Lamb", "Little Bo Peep", "Little Miss Muffet", and "The House that Jack Built" to determine how well key words were understood by adults. Questionnaires were administered and analyzed to determine whether the meanings of fleece, lingered, tuffet, curds, whey, bleating, fleecing, crook, malt, crumpled and tattered were understood by parents of First Graders. Questionnaire One was distributed to an urban school district and a suburban one. Then Questionnaire two was distributed to two completely different school districts, again one in an urban area the other a suburban one. The results indicated that a large number of adult parents who read these rhymes to their children had no or inadequate knowledge of key word meanings.

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Does "Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet" or "Little Bo Peep who lost her sheep", sound familiar? Of course they do. These are verses from one of the nursery rhymes we heard during our childhood. Nursery rhymes have been around for two hundred years, still capturing the hearts of everyone. There is something magical and special about these old English Satires. Nursery rhymes are enjoyed by the young and still enjoyed by many adults. Why do these nursery rhymes continue to hold the interest of generation after generation. There could be many reasons. Maybe it is that the lines of the rhymes are short, rhythmical and easy to remember. Or it could be just that the rhymes have a rhythmical jingle to them. What ever the reason, rhymes have been enjoyed worldwide by many cultures and for a very long time. Few of us knew or cared what Miss Muffet's tuffet or curds and whey were (Chaparro, 1979, p. 256). Most of us just enjoyed listening to or reciting these rhymes not caring about what tuffet or curds and whey meant. As can be seen, nursery rhymes are very important and a part of children's Literature. Most children are read Mother Goose rhymes from infancy through the early childhood years of Kindergarten and First Grade. For most children, rhymes are easy to memorize and fun. Many researchers have stated that, nursery rhymes can be a useful tool to use in the classroom. According to Huck

et al. (1987), knowledge of common nursery rhymes add four hundred words to a primary child's vocabulary. Therefore, why not integrate nursery rhymes with other disciplines in the school curriculum. Nursery rhymes can be used in Special Education Classes to teach the handicapped child. It also can be useful for the child in the ESL classroom. Nursery rhymes seem to be very versatile and can be useful to cover a wide spectrum of areas. The next quote is good advice for all of us, especially those with children at home.

> "The young child who is told nursery rhymes at home and school is led to an imaginative world-a world of poetry that lays important foundations for later language work. The child rich with oral language experience is well set to cope with the abstract quality of written language which as Vygotsky says, forms a stumbling block for many language learners." (Wade, 1982, P. 188.)

But memorization of rhymes may have its pitfalls as well. Does the adult ever learn to understand the meaning of certain words written in common nursery rhymes? For example in the nursery rhyme "The Farmer In The Dell," what does the word dell mean? Or in the rhyme "Little Miss Muffet", what are the meanings of the words curds and whey? This study is being undertaken to determine just that: to what extent do adults know the meaning of these words found in rhymes. This study will also compare the data found between two samples of the

population, one from an urban area and the other a suburban area.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that the general population of adults found in urban and suburban areas have no difficulty in defining words found in typical nursery rhymes and that there would be no significant differences found between the samples representing the two areas. It was also hypothesized that parents of young children do not explain the meanings of words found in common nursery rhymes and that nursery rhymes are being read to young children.

Delimitations

This study shall be limited to the families of First Grade students in two urban districts and two suburban districts. Questionnaires will be distributed to families of First Grade classes in those districts.

Limitations

The questionnaire was distributed to First Grade students to bring home for their parents to read and complete. They were returned back to school.

Assumptions

Those parents responding to the questionnaire will be honest in answering the questions. Not all the questionnaires will be returned, perhaps affecting the results of this study.

Procedures

Two questionnaires were carefully written to insure that no personal questions were asked. A cover letter was attached to each questionnaire specifying that the questionnaire be answered anonymously and honestly as possible. One side of the questionnaire was written in English, and the other in Spanish, so as to insure that the Spanish speaking population in the urban school district can answer it.

Questionnaire one was used to determine if context clues are helpful in deciphering what words mean. Factors like age, country of origin, gender, native language, and whether the general population of adults say they understand the meanings of certain words found in nursery rhymes will be analyzed. Questionnaire two required the writing of the actual definition of the word. This was used to determine if the definitions are truly known. While the goal of this study was to have at least two hundred questionnaires answered, it was assumed that at least seventy-five questionnaires would be returned. Questionnaire one was distributed to parents of five First Grades in an urban school district. The same questionnaire was distributed to two public schools and one parochial school in a suburban district, totaling six First Grades. Questionnaire two was sent to two completely different school districts, one school from an

urban area the other from a suburban area, each one having two first grades. One hundred and fifty copies of questionnaire two were distributed to the two schools with the assumption, at least twenty would be returned from each school in both districts. The nursery rhymes in this study are "The House That Jack Built", "Mary had a little Lamb", "Little Miss Muffet", and "Little Bo-Peep". The words fleece, lingered, tuffet, curds, whey, bleating, fleeting, crook, malt, tattered, and crumpled were listed out of context in the questionnaires, and subsequently put back into context. An analysis of the tabulated responses in both contexts was made with the following results.

Results

Table One shows the specific data pertaining to the type of population that answered questionnaire One. The data shows the ages, the sex, primary language, and country of origin.

Table one showed that eighty-three percent of the samples from a suburban area were women while eighty-nine percent were women from an urban area. Summarizing the results from table one, it can be seen that more women than men filled out the questionnaire. Age was another factor pertinent to this study. Most of the people fell between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five. Sixty-four percent of the samples were between the ages

Table One

Description of the Samples

Data	Urban	Suburban
1. Male	4	8
Female	33	41
2. Age:		
Below 25	6	0
25-35	24	25
35 or older	7	24
3. Country:		
U.S.A.	31	48
or other	6	1
3b. If the answer to question 3 is other, how long have you resided in the U.S.A. ?		
0-3 years	0	0
3-6 years	0	0
7-9 years	3	0
or longer	3	1

twenty-five and thirty-five in the urban area. Sixteen percent of the samples were below twenty-five years old and nineteen percent of the people were thirty-five years and older. The results in the suburban area were much more divided between the ages twenty-five to thirty-five and thirty-five years or older. According to the data fifty-one percent of the samples came between the ages twenty and thirty-five. And forty-nine percent who answered the questionnaire were thirty-five years or older. Another factor taken into consideration, was the

origin of one's country. Almost all the people in the samples were born in the United states. Eighty-nine percent of the people from the urban area had been born in the United States. In the suburban area the percentage was slightly higher, being ninety-eight percent.

Table Two shows the percentages of correct responses between an urban and suburban district. The questionnaire used in this study is found the appendix. Recorded in Table One are questions 4-15 from questionnaire I.

Table Two's data indicates that more of the people from the samples in the suburban area read nursery rhymes, being approximately ninety-seven percent, where as in the urban area it was found to be slightly less, about eighty-six percent. The statistics in question four did not show any significant difference between the two areas. Question number five stated, "Were nursery rhymes read to you as a child?" In both areas the yes responses were around seventy percent. Question number six inquired if adults read nursery rhymes to their children. About ninety-seven percent claimed yes in the suburban area and one hundred percent replied yes in the urban area. The data from question number seven indicated approximately eighty-nine percent in the urban area said they do explain unknown words found in nursery

Table Two

Question Responses by Sector

Results of Questions 4-15	Urban	Suburban
4. Have you ever read Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes?	86.49	97.96
5. Were Nursery rhymes ever read to you as a child?	72.97	73.47
6. Do you read Nursery Rhymes to your children?	100.00	97.96
7. Do you explain unknown words in nursery rhymes to your children when possible?	89.20	93.88
8. Do you know what the words fleece and lingered mean in "Mary had a Little Lamb"?	78.38	95.91
9. Do you know what the words tuffet, curds, and whey mean in "Little Miss Muffet"?	67.57	87.76
10. Do you know what the words bleating, fleeting, and crook mean in "Little Bo-Peep"?	70.27	73.50
11. Do you know what the words malt, tattered, and crumpled mean in "The House that Jack Built"?	70.27	87.76
12. Did reading the words fleece and lingered in the poem "Mary had a Little Lamb" help you understand the terms better?	78.38	79.59
13. Did reading the words tuffet, whey, and curds in the poem "Little Miss Muffet" help you understand the terms better?	72.97	75.51
14. Did reading the words bleating, fleeting, and crook in the poem "Little Bo-Peep" help you understand the terms better?	72.97	71.43
15. Did reading the words malt, crumpled, and tattered in the poem The House That Jack Built help you understand the terms better?	70.27	75.51

rhymes. The results from the suburban area were ninety-three percent. The general statement for the questions eight, nine, ten and eleven asked parents of First Graders if they understood what the words fleece, lingered, tuffet, curds, whey, bleating, fleeting, crook, tattered, and crumpled meant. The yes responses for the words fleece and lingered in "Mary had a Little Lamb" were about seventy-eight percent for the urban area and ninety-five percent for the suburban area. The words used in the rhyme "Little Miss Muffet" were tuffet, curds and whey. The results of the yes responses in both areas were sixty-seven percent for urban and eighty-seven percent for suburban. The third rhyme used in questionnaire one was "Little Bo Peep". The words bleating, fleeting and crook were used as part of this study. Seventy percent in the urban area had yes responses and seventy-three percent of the samples responded yes in the suburban area. In the rhyme, "The House that Jack Built", the words tattered, crumpled and malt were used. The yes responses for urban area were about seventy percent and in the suburban area it was around eighty-seven percent. There was a large difference between the results from question numbers eight, nine, and eleven. The words from question number eleven came from the rhyme "The House That Jack Built". Question numbers twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen

in Questionnaire One asked if reading words in context, which were found in bold print in the rhymes, helped to understand what these words meant. All the questions had similar results for the yes responses being around seventy percent.

The next step in the procedure of this study, was the distribution of Questionnaire Two. The second questionnaire was given out in two entirely different school districts, one an urban area the other being a suburban area. This questionnaire required the volunteers to actually write out the definitions of the words if they were known.

Table Three details these results. As can be seen, neither of the parents from the samples in both areas knew what the word tuffet meant. The responses were not

Table Three

Percentages of Positive Responses to Knowledge of Word Meanings

Words from Nursery Rhymes	Urban	Suburban
1. fleece	76.92	81.25
2. lingered	76.92	81.25
3. tuffet	0.00	0.00
4. curds	23.07	31.25
5. whey	7.69	.031
6. bleating	61.53	43.75
7. fleeting	61.53	76.92
8. crook	58.84	68.75
9. malt	23.07	0.00
10. crumpled	23.07	50.00
11. tattered	46.15	75.00

correct. Correct response for the percentage of both areas was zero. Understanding of the words curds, whey and malt fell significantly below fifty percent in both areas, when definitions were required. Most of the sample responses showed that a large majority of parents did not understand what these words meant in "Little Bo Peep" and "The House that Jack Built". The words tattered, malt and crumpled in the nursery rhyme "The House that Jack Built" showed major differences between the two areas. Twenty-three percent of the people from the samples in urban area had the correct meaning for the word crumpled, whereas in the suburban district it was about fifty percent. The data showed forty-six percent in the urban district knew what the word tattered meant and in the suburban area it was seventy-five percent. The findings for the word malt were very unusual. No one from the samples in the suburban area had the definition correct while twenty three percent had correct responses from the urban district.

The three words used in this study from "Little Bo Peep" were bleating, fleeting and crook. A difference can be seen in comparing the percentages for both areas for the word fleeting. Forty three percent of parents from the samples had the definitions correct in the suburban area and sixty-one percent in the urban area. There was only a ten percent difference between the two

areas for the word crook, the higher percentage found in the suburban area, being sixty-eight percent.

Comparing the results in tables two and three, the results in questionnaire number one showed larger percentages of the population in both areas saying that they understood what the words meant, while the results in table three had lower percentages who knew the meanings.

Conclusions and Implications

A comparison of the results between the two areas proved interesting indeed. For example the word tuffet was not understood by either area. The definitions were written incorrectly in both areas. The percentages for urban and suburban were both zero percent.

The hypothesis in this study was proven wrong by the results of Questionnaires One and Two. The hypothesis stated that parents of first graders would not have difficulty in defining words in nursery rhymes. In fact, according to the results parents of first graders did not define the words listed in Table Three correctly. There seemed to be a problem in actually defining these words.

The results in table three showed major differences between the percentages, the higher percentages being in the suburban area. The results for some words like whey and malt were slightly higher in the urban district.

According to the results, most of the parents of first graders were born in the U.S.A. Almost all the parents of first graders were women, only a small percentage of men responded.

The ages of the parents were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five years old in the urban district. In the suburban area the ages were almost divided evenly between twenty-five to thirty-five years old and thirty-five years or older.

Almost all of the parents read nursery rhymes to their children from both areas, one hundred percent in the urban area and ninety-seven percent in the suburban area. While it has been said that parents of first graders in the suburban area read more to their children than parents from an urban area, the results from the urban area were somewhat higher than from the suburban area.

Questionnaire Two required the samples to actually define all the words in Table Three. Taking a look at all the words and also comparing both areas, the percentage for the suburban area was much higher. There is an exception where one percentage was higher in the urban area and that was for the word bleating.

Comparing the results for the two questionnaires led to the conclusion that the parents of first graders in the samples did not truly understand the meanings of

words found in Table Three. It is recommended that additional studies be carried out with parents of children from other grades, to determine how widespread the lack of understanding is of such words as used in this study.

As stated earlier, few of us who read nursery rhymes knew or cared what these words meant. Nursery rhymes were just enjoyed for their rhythm and rhyme and apparently an approximation of understanding. The results of both questionnaires appeared to proved this. However, the earliest acquisition of vocabulary by repetitions in rhymes without meaning, with incorrect or distorted meaning is an unexpected handicap. Later lack of comprehension appears to relate to a lack of instruction. Why not explain the meanings of words along with the reading of rhymes to provide full comprehension enabling rhymes to be fully enjoyed.

The Uncertainty of Word Meanings Found in Nursery Rhyme Vocabulary Related Research

Old familiar Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes like "Mary Had a Little Lamb", "The Farmer In The Dell", "Little Miss Muffet", and many more have been remembered by each generation for a very long time. These Old English satires have been around for over two hundred years. Nursery rhymes are short, rhythmical, and easy to remember. For most children, rhymes are easily memorized and fun to hear. Nursery rhymes are enjoyed worldwide by everyone and from many different cultures.

> "Part of the spell of poetry is in the rhythm of language, used by poets who understood how powerful a factor rhythm can be, how compelling and unforgettable. Almost anything put into rhythm and rhyme is more memorable than the something said in prose." (Dickey, 1982, p. 4)

"Poetry is powerful magic. Children are drawn to it by its rhythm, repetitions and rhyme, its imagery and its use of powerful themes." (Mills, 1980, p. 3)

Nursery rhymes have been around for a long time, capturing the hearts of everyone. From where did the name Mother Goose come? It really is not known. But we know that Mother Goose is the name of a make believe character who tells rhymes and stories to children. Mother Goose's name appears on countless books of nursery rhymes. Most historians do not believe Mother Goose was a real person. The name appeared in a book published by Charles Perrault in France in the year 1697. This book contained well known tales like "Cinderella", "Bluebeard", and "Sleeping Beauty". In the year 1765,

Mother Goose's Melody was published in England by John Newbury. In Mother Goose's Melody, was a collection of nursery rhymes, including "Old King Cole" and "Little Tom Tucker". Then Newbury's books were published in Massachusetts by Isaiah Thomas in the year 1786. Since then many collections of Mother Goose Rhymes have been printed. Children are introduced to such characters as "Little Bo Peep", "Little Jack Horner", and not forgetting of course "Jack and Jill". Mills has stated that poetry is a powerful magic. What makes Nursery Rhymes so magical? Words that rhyme and sound alike, the word sounds echo each other. Rhyming words like season, reason, house, and mouse add to the beautiful sound and rhythm of many poems. A short simple poem that uses rhyming words is also called a rhyme like "Little Miss Muffet". A poem's rhythm help to set the mood. In some poems the rhythm races and in others the rhythm rolls along. The sounds in words are important to poetry's rhythm. Rhyming word whose final syllables sound alike also add to the rhythm. In some poems, only the last word in every line rhymes. Poets may create word pictures by using similes, comparing two things and using "like" or "as". Metaphors also create a word picture. Metaphors compare two things, but the words "like" or "as" are not used. When reciting a poem one can hear the flow of the sounds and rhythm. Some poems may even sound

like music. Lyrical Poems have a strong musical quality to them. There are several kinds of Lyrical Poems, one is Haiku, a Japanese poem that has three lines. The first line having five syllables, the second line having seven syllables, and the third having five. The other kind of Lyrical Poem is a Limerick. A Limerick has five lines. The first, second, and last lines end with the same rhyming sound. The third and fourth end with another rhyming sound.

Poetry is very old. People were reciting or singing poems long before they learned how to write. All societies have poetry. It may have began as a chanting of magic spells. Early poetry that survived often had to do with magic or religion. Sacred texts of many religions were first recited as poetry. Parts of the Bible are in verse. Before they were written, people kept words alive in their memories. Generation after generation the verses in poems were memorized. Poetry is easier to remember than prose. Today poems are found in books, magazines, recordings and also one can hear poetry read aloud. So as one can see poetry has been around for a long time as part of many early civilizations.

> "Poetry's rhythm is very magical and memorable than words said in prose. Why is this, no one knows completely, though the answer is surely rooted far down in the biology by means of which we exist; in the circulation of the blood that goes forth from the heart and comes back, and in the repetition of breathing. Croesus was a rich

> Greek King, back in the sixth century. This was written on his tombstone.
>
> No Croesus lies in the grave you see; I was poor laborer, and this suites me.
>
> That is plain-spoken and definitive. You believe it and the rhyme helps you believe it and keep it." (Dickey, 1982, p. 4)

Can poetry be used in the school curriculum? Yes, nursery rhymes can be a useful tool in the classroom. It should be part of a school's curriculum. According to Huck et al. (1987), "Knowledge of common nursery rhymes add four hundred words to a primary child's vocabulary." Why not integrate these rhymes in the school's curriculum.?

> "Nursery rhymes and written phonics used in a meaningful context are valuable teaching methods which can be applied to a whole language classroom or in conjunction with a basal reading program. They provide forms for the oral beginnings of the best of linguistic skills." (Dougherty, 1989)

Nursery rhymes are so versatile and unique, many activities can be created from them. Poems can be written down to use for reading materials. Poems also can be used for word recognition and comprehension activities in the classroom. Through poetry, children can learn to read and realize that words can be written down in print. This is one of the first stages in reading. "Words play an important role in poetry. Children gain an appreciation for the language through its study. They identify with the characters and situations in poems and, through this, gain insights into

themselves." (Norton, 1983). There are many excellent objectives when teaching young children rhymes. One is children become familiar with good literature. Another is that children can understand the concept of a story. Nursery rhymes also provide graphophonemic skills. The other skills learned are the left to right progression, spacing, letter and sound patterns in words, and that words have meanings.

There are many reasons why nursery rhymes should be used with four and five year old children.

> "Their language patterns are varied and have an unmistakable musical quality. Rhythm, rhyme and alliteration that please young ears. They offer opportunities for active participation. Verses are short and easily memorized and can be chanted. The narrative quality: They tell us a good story. Quick and decisive action: not moralistic, but justice is swift and sure. Characters have interesting personalities, they are decidedly good or wicked-fat or thin. Appeal to children's interest-animals, pies, shoes, mice, clocks-all things children know or like to hear about. Often related simple, everyday experiences. Varied humor from animals and people in ridiculous situations. Pure nonsense and exaggeration." (Huck, Helper and Hickman, 1987)

There are many other good reasons why poems should be used in the school curriculum. One point that will be looked at: Does using Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes benefit the ESL child? Yes, it does for many good reasons. Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes have short, simple, and interesting stories. There are many interesting

characters like Jack Sprat, Little Miss Muffet, and Humpty Dumpty. The poems have natural rhythm that help the ESL child with English intonation. Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes also provide the springboards for speaking, writing, and reading skills. Many activities can be created using Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes to develop vocabulary words. The ESL student can role play and many dramas can be acted out in the classroom using Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes. "The Three Little Kittens", "Simple Simon", "Six Little Mice", "Little Miss Muffet", etc., all can be used for plays in the classroom. Acting out these nursery rhymes, a child can learn what a tuffet is. One child can actually be a tuffet, and the other children in the classroom can see that a tuffet is something on which to sit. The words in the poem become more meaningful because the meaning of the words like tuffet or muffet is understood by the child. Another meaningful activity is for the ESL teacher to ask questions pertaining to the nursery rhyme, and then to write down the child's comment. This reinforces the skill that what the child speaks is important, and these words can be written down in print. Most of the time the child can read his own sentence back even if he does not know how to read yet. Also, nursery rhymes develop the rhyming skills the ESL child needs for the first and

second grades. Rhyming words provide a good springboard for beginning reading skills and language arts skills.

> "Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes are an important part of our culture, and as such should be taught. Virtually all children growing up in the English - speaking world have Mother Goose in their heritage. Mother Goose is the basis of jokes, puns, and allusions in adult literature. Mother Goose has been enjoyed by children since 1697. That's really standing the test of time." (Galeano, 1983, p. 3)

Another point made, children who come from homes where another language is spoken or Spanish is the primary language most likely have not been exposed to Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes, especially in the Spanish language or in any other language. When one tries to translate the poem into Spanish, the words and meanings in a poem change. Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes can not be translated into Spanish. The poem would not make any sense, and the story of the Mother Goose's Nursery Rhyme would be lost. It is important to expose these children to the interesting characters and stories of Mother Goose. The ESL student who has not heard the adventures of "Humpty Dumpty", or "Jack and Jill", or the clever stories of "The Little Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe", and "Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater", are at a disadvantage. Poetry is in all languages, but each culture has its own poems passed down from each generation in that language.

Another point that will be discussed, can nursery rhymes be advantageous in teaching handicapped children in Special Education? According to Glenn and Cunningham, it can. In 1982, Rogow did a study that proved receptive language increased in handicapped children due to the daily reading of Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes in a session. There was much interaction between mother, teacher and the blind and physically handicapped child in each session. A study done by Glenn and Cunningham proved that both non-handicapped and handicapped infants with Downs Syndrome preferred the nursery rhyme over the piano tune. The handicapped infants were about the developmental level age of nine months and the non-handicapped infants were nine months old. Doing a follow up with the same study, nursery rhymes were sung to the same children who had listened to nursery rhymes and piano tunes. The children had the choice to listen to a familiar nursery rhymes or nursery rhymes with different words, but still having the same rhythm, intonation, and stress patterns. The results were as follows: six out of the nine infants with Downs Syndrome and five out of seven non-handicapped infants preferred to listen to the nursery rhymes with familiar words that were heard daily. The study points to evidence, that both non-handicapped and handicapped infants began to recognize the words in a rhyme at about the developmental

level age of nine months for the handicapped infant and nine months of age for the non-handicapped infant. According to Glenn and Cunningham, words in a nursery rhyme which are repeated often enough will aid in word recognition. A third study by Glenn and Cunningham showed infants preferred to listen to their mother's voices rather than to the voice of another adult. When nursery rhymes were added to this study, both non-handicapped and handicapped infants preferred to listen to the nursery rhymes longer than to their mothers. The same infants were tested at eighteen months old, the non-handicapped infants responded more to their mother's voice that the nursery rhymes. The handicapped infants who had delayed language preferred to listen to nursery rhymes. These studies indicated nursery rhymes may be advantageous in teaching handicapped children with delayed language. Glenn and Cunningham's studies did help to prove Rogow's study in 1982.

Nursery rhymes can be adapted for any school curriculum and any grade level, including for the ESL classroom and for handicapped students. Another grade level not mentioned in this paper is the intermediate level. Nursery rhymes can be the foundation to teach creative writing and research techniques. Older students can research the origins of some of these rhymes. Today there is much controversy as to where some of these

rhymes originated. No one really knows for sure. "Many rhymes were not only early games or chants for children, but remnants of tavern and street cries or customary adult rituals." (Sheppard, 1982, p. 7) How can one go wrong? Nursery rhymes have that magical rhythm and rhyme that is enjoyed by all. Many skills for reading, writing and speaking can be taught through Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes. "The Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes offer a wealth of topics and a wealth of springboards to learning vocabulary and other language skills. After two hundred years, they still hold children's interest and provide ways to learn about their world." (Galeano, 1983, p. 9) When one reads nursery rhymes they are usually read with pleasure. "The reading process becomes more difficult when pleasure is not a main part of that process." (Wade, 1982, p. 12) Why not use nursery rhymes? Rhymes are an important part of children's literature and part of our English heritage. Rhymes are enjoyed by people of all different ages. "Our own recollections of our childhood experiences with nursery rhymes tells us something about their importance for all children." (Chaparro, 1979, p. 256) Are nursery rhymes repeated from our childhood memories word for word and is every word understood? There needs to be more evidence to answer this question. Many adults may not know what the words "dell", "curds", "whey", "crook", "fleece",

"lingered", "tuffet", "bleating", "fleeting", "malt", and "tattered" are. What could be the reason? It is hard to say. Could it be that most of us during our childhood never really cared what "dell", "curds", and "whey", etc., meant? But rather just enjoyed the rhythm and rhyme of words found in Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes. Would it be more meaningful to teach elementary students the meanings of these words? Yes, it would. The poem will then be more meaningful and more thoroughly enjoyed. Possibly the reason why the meanings of the words "curds", "whey", and "dell", etc., are not known by many people is simply because the meanings of these words were not explained. Nursery rhymes were recited and used in many of our playing games during our childhood years. Nursery rhymes like these, "Ring Around The Rosie" and "London Bridge Is Falling Down", were part of our games. Was there too much emphasis on memorizing rhymes?

Yes there was. Many of us as children recited these poems not even knowing what some words meant. When we read something, don't we need to understand what words mean in order to comprehend what we just read. The ultimate goal in reading is comprehension. Many of us use context clues to figure out what a word means in a sentence. Sometimes a reader may have poor skills with context clues. This may cause someone to have difficulty in deciphering what a word means in a sentence. The

point here, is that comprehension of a word is very important, whether it be a reading selection or a poem. There is some value in memorizing a poem. Poems are part of literature and part of our heritage. Explaining the meanings of words in a poem is even more important that memorization. "Poems related for memorization must be only those that children appreciate and comprehend." (Nist, 1981, p. 2) The important word in this quote is comprehend. Words in poems that are memorized must also be understood.

Are poems being used in Kindergarten and First Grade? There is not enough evidence to answer and support this question. Poetry seems to be a very difficult subject for most children. Children can recite all the words, but do they understand the meanings of the words in a rhyme? "Years of instructing prospective language arts teachers in children's literature have indicated that the area where students are least prepared and most bewildered in that of poetry." (Nist, 1982, p. 2) Could it be part of the problem that too much emphasis was placed on memorizing the poem, rather than learning to understand meanings of words in rhymes.

Can context clues help the majority of readers figure out the meanings of words in nursery rhymes? Also can adults of Hispanic descent or other origins guess the meanings of these words through context clues. How

important are context clues? Context clues are very important for reading. They are also important reading methods for understanding the meanings of words in a sentence or rhyme and also to identify any unknown word. This skill needs to be worked on constantly throughout the grades. If the reader has good context clues when reading, this insures more of a success in reading. For example, in the verse "Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet", reading the verse, one can assume that a tuffet is something to sit on. But if the reader can not extract contextual clues necessary for word comprehension; the meaning of the word tuffet will not be understood. It is pertinent that context clues be taught in all grade levels and should be a fundamental part of every school's reading program.

There are many ways using context clues where one can figure out the meaning of the word. One type of context clue is the definition of the word is found directly in the sentence. For example, a brook is a small stream. If you had never seen the word brook and did not know its meaning, from the sentence one would understand that the word meant a small stream. Another type of context clue is where the explanation of the word appears in the sentence. Example, the woman did a ballet on the stage. This means a kind of formal dancing with formal poses, turns, and leaps. Through this type of

context clue the definition is explained in the next sentence. Another way in which one can figure out a meaning of a word is through our own experiences and backgrounds. Example, if a child attends baseball games quite frequently, and comes across the word fielder, which he never saw before, most likely he would be able to read the word and understand its meaning because of context clues in the sentence. Context clue words are sometimes compared and contrasted in a sentence. This type of word clue shows similar or opposite meanings of words. Example, the lack of fresh air made him feel drowsy, but he became wide awake as soon as he stepped outside. Comparing and contrasting the word drowsy with the word wide-awake, drowsy would mean sleepy. Context clues are an important part in building reading skills. A word may appear in the sentence, where someone may not be able to identify the word or may not know its meaning. All readers, even the most experienced may come across such words from time to time. Of course there is a dictionary to help in finding a word's meaning. But at times a reader can figure out what a word means from the clues in a sentence. The clue may appear directly in the sentence or in other surrounding sentences. What does this have to do with Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes? Context clues are a part of reading. Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes are a good springboard for beginning

reading, writing, and speaking skills. Why not incorporate context clues and the use of Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes in First Grade. For example, the rhyme "Little Miss Muffet" asks the children if anyone knows the meaning of the word tuffet. Replace the word tuffet with the word chair, stool or bench, etc. Initially, the children will learn that a tuffet is something to sit on. Carry it still further, the children will learn exactly what a tuffet is; a little mound of grass.

Reading methods have improved tremendously over the years. There have been many studies and researchers in this field, improving reading to what it is today.

Reading is one of the most important subjects in a school's curriculum. It is very important that parents and children set aside time at home for reading. Children should read or be read to at least fifteen minutes or longer a day. Reading is a complicated process. It involves many skills that come together, which makes children good readers. Reading is defined as follows by the National Commission on Reading, "Reading is the process of constructing reading from written text. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information." (Peterman and Kimmel, 1990, p. 314)

Nursery rhymes can provide the many reading skills that are needed for a beginner reader.

> "Many parents read to their children in order to pass along cultural stories and lessons. They assist in the process of learning to read by listening to children, by answering their questions, by providing them with opportunities to explore written language and their own writing and perhaps most importantly by reading to them." (Peterman and Kimmel, 1990, p. 317)

Authorities agree that reading stories should always begin at home. Children are never too young or old to have something read to them. Reading at home lays the foundation for literacy as well as for success in school. When reading is valued as something very important, the child acquires a sense of reading as being valuable and challenging. Nursery rhymes can be a part of that acquired value. Parents should explain the meanings of words like "dell", "fleece", "curds", etc., to a kindergarten and a first grader. Explaining many of these words will not take the enjoyment away from the magical rhythm and rhyming words found in nursery rhymes. Most of these words like "dell", "fleece", "bleating", etc., were not explained to us when we were children. Therefore, we should change this tradition and explain the meaning of words in a nursery rhyme. Understanding what all the words mean in a rhyme, then Mother Goose Rhymes will truly be enjoyed.

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Appendix

Dear Parents:

I am a graduate student under the Reading Program at Kean College.

This questionaire will help complete a study done on certain words found in poems that many of us may not know.

Please answer the questionaire by circling one answer in each question. This questionaire is to be anonomous filled out by yourself. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Linda Gruss

Questionnaire

Please be as honest as possible. It is totally anonymous even to myself.

Circle one answer in each of the following questions.

1. Male or Female

2. Age
   Below 25 25-35 35 or older

3a. Country of origin
   U.S.A. or other

3b. If answer to question number 3a is other, then how long have you resided in the U.S.A.
   0-3 3-6 7-9 or longer

3c. Primary language spoken at home.
   English or other

4. Have you ever read Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes?
   Yes No

5. Were nursery rhymes ever read to you as a child?
   Yes No

6. Do you read nursery rhymes to your children?
   Yes No

7. Do you explain unknown words in nursery rhymes to your children when possible?
   Yes No

8. Mary Had A Little Lamb
   Do you know what these words mean?
   1. fleece
   2. lingered
   Yes No

9. Little Miss Muffet
   Do you know what these words mean?
   1. tuffet
   2. curds
   3. whey
   Yes No

10. Little Bo Peep
Do you know what these words mean?
1. bleating
2. fleeting
3. crook
Yes No

11. The House That Jack Built
Do you know what these words mean?
1. malt
2. tattered
3. crumpled
Yes No

12. Mary Had A Little Lamb
Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow;
And everywhere that Mary went,
The lamb was sure to go.
It followed her to school one day,
That was against the rule;
It made the children laugh and play
To see a lamb at school.
And so the teacher turned it out,
But still it lingered near;
And waited patiently about
Till Mary did appear.
Did reading the words fleece and lingered in the poem help you understand the terms better?
Yes No

13. Little Miss Muffet
Little Miss Muffet Sat on a tuffet,
Eating of curds and whey;
Along came a spider,
And sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away.
Did reading the words tuffet, curds and whey in the poem help you understand the terms better?
Yes No

14. Little Bo-Peep
Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep
And can't tell where to find them;
Leave them alone, and they'll come home,
Wagging their tails behind them.
Little Bo-Peep fell fast asleep,
And dreamed she heard them bleating.
But when she awoke, she found it a joke.
For still they all were fleeting.
Then she took her little crook,
Determined for to find them;
She found them indeed,
but it made her heart bleed,
For they'd left thier tails behind them.

Did reading the words bleating, fleeting and crook in the poem help you understand the terms better?
Yes No

15. The House That Jack Built

This is the house that Jack built.
This is the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the cat, that killed the rat,
that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the dog, that worried the cat,
That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the cow with the crumpled horn,
That tossed the dog, that worried the cat,
That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the maiden all forlorn,
That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
That tossed the dog, that worried the cat,
That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the man all tattered and torn,
That kissed the maiden all forlorn,
That milked the cow with the crumpled horn,
That tossed the dog, that worried the cat,
That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.

Did reading the words malt,crumpled and tattered in the poem help you understand the terms better?
Yes No

Dear Parents:

I am a graduate student under the Reading Program at Kean College. This questionnaire will help complete a study on certain words found in poems that many of us may not know.

Please answer the questionnaire by filling in answers for each question. This questionnaire is to be anonymously filled out.

Please return this questionnaire to your child's teacher as soon as possible.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Linda Gruss

Questionnaire

Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. This questionnaire is totally anonymous even to myself.

Please write the definitions out if you know them. Please do not use a dictionary, using a dictionary would cause the study to become invalid.

Directions: Write the definition of the words on the lines provided. If you do not know what the word means circle the words "I do not know."

1. Mary Had a Little Lamb.
   Mary had a little lamb,
      Its fleece was white as snow;
   And everywhere that Mary went,
      The lamb was sure to go.
   It followed her to school one day,
      That was against the rule;
   It made the children laugh and play
      To see a lamb at school.
   And so the teacher turned it out,
      But still it lingered near;
   And waited patiently about,
      Till Mary did appear.

What are the definitions of these words from Mary Had A Little Lamb.

A. Fleece _____
   or circle
   Fleece I do not know

B. Lingered _____
   or circle
   Lingered I do not know

2. Little Miss Muffet
   Little Miss Muffet
     Sat on a tuffet,
   Eating of curds and whey;
     Along came a spider,

And sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

What are the definitions of these words from Little Miss Muffet?

A. Tuffet_____

or circle

Tuffet I do not know

B. Curds_____

or circle

Curds I do not know

C. Whey_____

or circle

Whey I do not know

3. Little Bo-Peep

Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep
And can't tell where to find them;
Leave them alone, and they'll come home,
Wagging their tails behind them.
Little Bo-Peep fell fast asleep,
And dreamed she heard them bleating.
But when she awoke, she found it a joke.
For still they all were fleeting.
Then she took her little crook,
Determined for to find them;
She found them indeed, but it made her heart bleed,
For they'd left their tails behind them.

What are the definitions of these words from Little Bo Peep?

A. Bleating_____

or circle

Bleating I do not know

B. Fleeting_____

or circle

Fleeting I do not know

C. Crook_____

or circle

Crook I do not know

4. The House That Jack Built.

This is the house that Jack built.
This is the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the rat, that ate the malt

That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the cat, that killed the rat, that ate the malt That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the dog, that worried the cat, That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the cow with the crumpled horn, That tossed the dog, that worried the cat, That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the maiden all forlorn, That milked the cow with the crumpled horn, That tossed the dog, that worried the cat, That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.
This is the man all tattered and torn, That kissed the maiden all forlorn, That milked the cow with the crumpled horn, That tossed the dog, that worried the cat, That killed the rat, that ate the malt
That lay in the house that Jack built.

What are the definitions of these words from The House That Jack Built?

A. Malt _____

or circle
Malt I do not know

B. Crumpled _____

or circle
Crumpled I do not know

C. Tattered _____

or circle
Tattered I do not know